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A photo —

A kitchen with a fish on the kitchen table.

We look at the kitchen and the eye of the fish.

What has happened here?

And can we form an idea of the historical development and its constituent occurrences, which are actualised in history?

Are we, as Norman Mailer states in regard to the uncanny in cubism, placed in a landscape of the psyche, where past and future live, the entire inner world of night, dreams, memories and primitive premonitions? (Mailer, 1996: 310)

And are we aware that the past and the future are even more closely bound up with each other than the present moment?

I will attempt to uncover the iconography of the motif, which involves its cultural, historical and design-wise importance in the broadest sense. I will attempt to demonstrate coherences, on the one hand of a period in architectural history, and on the other, of the representation of the unprepared meal, and that there is an immediate connection between these two independent phenomena.

Does the photo represent an invitation to give up on the simple and classical point of view, to which we are almost doomed, and freely, at least in our thoughts, move around the object represented as the motif, the fish, a *Merluccius merluccius*, and further around the house in order to meet the historical reality behind this specific house, Villa Stein, designed by Le Corbusier? The simultaneous representation of the object from several angles in the motif is implicated like it is in cubism. At least a virtual mobility from the viewer's part is allowed, and it would be a contradiction to pass on such an invitation – we are invited.

In order to unfold this creation in the material, it is necessary to go back in time and study the movements that reformed the figurative arts from around 1908 and the following years, and which affected Le Corbusier's design of Villa Stein. The rate at which the development and also the resemblance with the results that were attained simultaneously by different artists, who followed different paths like painting, sculp-

ture, architecture and literature, showed that a very vital process was taking place. I am going to explore whether or not this tendency also applied to gastronomy.

Around 1910, the notion that the artist's means of expression had lost its connection to the modern world started to emerge.

Between 1907 and 1908, the first cubistic works by Picasso and Braque were produced, and that was the starting signal of the increasing radical contributions from e.g. Gris, Léger and Delaunay (Benevolo, 1989: 390).

The method that the cubists developed as a means of representing spatial relations led to the design principles of the new conception of space. Both Picasso and Le Corbusier found their inspiration in Paris. Here, I will draw attention to Sigfried Giedion's perception of space-time: 'As a consequence of a new understanding of space Picasso and Braque about 1910 showed the inside and the outside simultaneously. In architecture Le Corbusier in line with the same principle developed the mutual penetration of the interior and exterior space' (Bek et al., 1997: 254).

According to Giedion, the results did not gain sympathy among the general audience. From the Renaissance and up till 1900, the central perspective had been one of the fundamental elements in painting; across all styles. This four-hundred-year-old tradition of perceiving the external world in a Renaissance manner, which means in three dimensions, had taken root deeply in man. It was impossible to imagine other forms of perception. But in the 19th century, the perspective was misused and, says Giedion, this led to its disintegration. His explanation is that the cubists not only attempted to depict an object's external appearance from one point of view. They moved around it, and tried to get a hold of its internal composition. They thus sought to expand the sphere of the emotions (Bek et al., 1997: 263).

As such, cubism settles with the perspective of the Renaissance. It perceives the object relatively, hence from several points of view, of which not one single viewpoint dominates. By dissecting the objects in this manner, cubism conceives them from all angles. Therefore, a forth dimension is added to the Renaissance's three; namely time. The poet Guillaume Apollinaire was the first person to recognise and express this change around 1911, and in 1913 his book *Les Peintres cubistes* was published. The same year, the first cubistic exhibition at Salon des Indépendants took place.

The scientific crisis regarding the traditional concept of time and space linked up the history of the conventions of perspective (Benevolo, 1989: 392).

To present an object seen from different perspectives, introduces a principle which is closely connected to the modern life of the past – contemporaneousness. In 1905, Einstein initiated his famous work *Electrodynamik bewegter Körper*, which contains a thorough review of the notion of the contemporary (Bek, et al., 1997: 264).

Einstein's theory of relativity would not only link up time and space, but also gravity, and he thus tried to create some sort of uniformity in his perception of the universe.

In the beginning, it was not *a priori* that the cubistic perception of spatial construction could be utilised in other areas than painting. The symbols of cubism were

not rational and could not be used directly in architecture and handicrafts, but they were still ahead of and guidelines for artistic creations. As a follow-up to this, Le Corbusier among others tried to rationalise cubism. Converted to the plane of practical spatiality in architecture, the new mobility presented an opportunity to break with the classical static systems. These are the pure visual progressions that were composed on the conditions for axes and symmetry as a means of reintegrating the sum of the total complex experience of movement in architecture (Leymarie,1968: 41). Le Corbusier called his art purism. It emerged in relation to constructivism in Russia and neo-plasticism in the Netherlands, closest to cubism's own goals and to architecture (Bek et al., 1997: 265).

In 1927, Le Corbusier created Villa Stein de Monzie. The residence, if anything, constituted the central problem in modern architecture, and Le Corbusier expressed his ideas about this in the precept 'une maison – un palais'. At the end of the 1920s, Le Corbusier tried to carry out research on both the new technological cultures and the architectonic systems of the past, simultaneously, in his puristic architecture. He chose living-quarters as a type in the completion and the actualisation of this research. To focus on living-quarters as an object of architectural discourse was, according to Le Corbusier, to bestow dignity on modern life (Gans, 1987: 60). As Le Corbusier in this way intended to monumentalise living-quarters, he was charged with the task of creating a personal and modern equivalent. A weekend house for Gabrielle de Monzie, former wife of the Minister of Housing and Building, Anatole de Monzie, in whom Corbusier found a client with status, culture and wealth, for whom he could construct a house with the grandeur of a palace. The other client in this unusual joint venture was Michael Stein, Gertrude Stein's brother, and his wife Sarah, painter and collector of Matisse (Gans, 1987: 60).

As an answer, Le Corbusier developed a composition which he called 'mask of simplicity', or Dom-Ino, a sheet-column structure.

When Corbusier settled in Paris at the age of 30, he had not paid much attention to cubism. Nevertheless, it was in the spirit of cubism that he chose to take up his own standing in a manifesto entitled 'après le Cubism'. This manifesto was accomplished in co-operation with the painter Amedée Ozenfant (Leymarie, 1968: 35).

In the manifesto, Corbusier accentuated the ethical value of the principles that had been promoted by the initiators of cubism; namely to reduce the form to its geometrical – and thus clear – elements, and to re-evaluate the idea of composition, i.e. the construction. To Le Corbusier, cubism unfolded an uncertainty in the utilisation of constructive principles. Therefore, Le Corbusier concluded that the new age needed precision, or at least a spirit of precision, which cubism until then had proved to be incapable of (Leymarie, 1968: 38).

Purism marketed its aesthetics in the periodical *L'Esprit nouveau*, 1920–1925, and through Le Corbusier, it was introduced to architecture. In 1929, American architectural-theorist Henry-Russell Hitchcock labelled this form of architecture

'International Style'. He pin-pointed that this style emphasised volume and plane above mass, and also that architecture eschews ornament and utilises the machine as an artistic tool (Skude, 1989: 23).

In e.g. Choisy and Viollet-le-Duc's tradition, Le Corbusier searched for his knowledge in the past. Not for the stylistic characteristics, but for principles regarding the organisation of space and the rational structure.

What is so brilliant about Villa Stein is the way in which systems of historical and modern architecture are brought into relation with one another, and whereby they create a number of interpretations and coherences at the same time.

For Le Corbusier, the fundamental answer to modernity was the Dom-Ino framework of reinforced concrete columns and sheets, and the unbroken layers of space that are generated hereby. A system that extricates the walls in Villa Stein – internally as well as externally. Even though the non-load-bearing walls are extricated from the internal demanding structure and do not need to conform to the division of the rooms so they, more abstractly, express the layers of space from back to front. The continued layers of space are consonant with the compositional planes of layers of overlapping planes. As an example, the façades are organised as a series of overlapping planes, some real, others implied. They either yield or arise in relation to the plane of the white walls (Gans, 1987: 62). In the front façade, the windows appear both as background to the white wall and as fillets on a level with the wall. By finishing the corner of the house, the windows suggest a layer of space parallel to the villa. They give weight to the extreme periphery of the façade, but they are separated from it as to the centripetal composition of cubistic paintings. On the back façade, the proportions of the fillets are reversed, but their ambiguity and their ability to raise the surface are the same. Where the spatiality of the house seems to collapse into a tight front façade with a lot of implied planes, the courtyard façade seems to explode into the surface far away from the other. The horizontal mouldings of the stair's landing, the terrace and the roof garden describe a visual progression, which moves up and back in relation to the reference plane of the right wall (Gans, 1987: 61).

I will try to exemplify this. The entrepreneurs, especially Michael and Sarah Stein, were famous art-lovers and collectors. Therefore, there were not only great demands regarding the lay-out of the house, but also a demand for a suitable room for the gigantic collection of paintings and sculptures. The house, first and foremost, contains generous corridors and rooms with enormous spatial qualities, created by means of a perfect inflow of light and proportional balance. Villa Stein is regarded one of the most sumptuous of Le Corbusier's villas, in the sense that he has been prodigal of space in order to attain these architectural effects. Here, Le Corbusier completed what he referred to as 'une promenade architecturale', an architectural pleasure-walk (Statens Museum for Kunst, the Danish National Gallery, Catalogue, 1987: 89).

The Palladian design of Villa Foscari was also reflected in the interior. Not intact of course, but transformed in accordance with modern rules. The ground-plan is very

harmonious in its implementation, just like the façade. The distinct shapes and slopes that fill the interior, e.g. the S-shaped plan, which is the expression of the great central room that can be seen from the roof, manifests the same sensibility as the well-formed bottles in Corbusier's still lifes. However, they do not represent these objects. On the contrary, they spring from an eclectic repertoire of architectural, machine-age and historical sources deprived of their original ornamental features.

Transparency constitutes yet another level of interpretation in connection with cubism, and I will try to describe how transparency is uncovered in Villa Stein. In this connection, it is interesting to see how Rowe and Slutzky, in their analysis, make use of Gyorgy Kepe's wording from *Language of Vision*: 'When looking on one or more figures overlapping each other and how much both claim their common share, we are facing a contradiction in spatial relations. To solve this contradiction we must assume the presence of a new optical quality. The figures are provided with a transparency, which means that they are capable of penetrating each other mutually without the optical disappearing. Transparency however implies more than an optical characteristic. Transparency involves a comprehensive spatial order. Transparency means simultaneously handling different spatial conditions. The space is not only drawing back but fluctuates in a continuous activity. The positions of the transparent figures have an ambiguous meaning (alt. significance) when we see the single figure sometimes close, sometimes fare away' (Bek et al., 1997: 275).

As such, transparency can be the object's inherent attribute as e.g. the curtain wall of glass in a building, or it can be the inherent quality of the construction. Rowe and Slutzky distinguish between literal transparency and phenomenon-bound transparency. The sense of phenomenon-bound transparency probably originates from the cubistic painting alone.

They refer to Alfred Barr, who states that Apollinaire 'raises the fourth dimension in a metaphorical rather than in a mathematical meaning'. This is essential in Rowe and Slutzky's presentation of considerations regarding architectonic transparency. The painting can merely offer the third dimension, while architecture cannot suppress it. Since architecture in reality is three-dimensional and is not just an imitation of three dimensions, the sense of literal transparency is, thus, a physical fact. For that reason, phenomenon-bound transparency is harder to achieve than literal transparency, and it is so difficult to discuss that there has been a great willingness to solely combine transparency in architecture with the transparency of materials.

Picasso's *L'Arlésienne* from 1911–1912 supplies the visual support to these reflections, because of the great transparency of overlapping surfaces in the painting. Picasso exhibits surfaces that seemingly are made of celluloid, which gives the audience a sensation of looking straight through. Thereby, a material transparency is experienced. In his slant constructed image space however, Picasso offers unlimited access to alternative interpretations through the constellation of larger and smaller shapes (Bek et al., 1997: 282)

Rowe and Slutzky use Villa Stein in their analysis of phenomenon-bound transparency, where they establish that Le Corbusier does not allow for discontinuances in the horizontal movement of glass. Glass is led around the corner with emphasis. In architecture, Le Corbusier is primarily occupied with the surface-wise qualities of glass and not with its translucent attributes (Bek et al., 1997: 282).

In Villa Stein two of modern architecture's ambitions have, thus, succeeded. Not as an unconscious return of the progress coming from the science of engineering, but as an actualisation of an artist's conscious intention. There is a suspended vertical grouping of planes that satisfy our wish for relational rooms, and there is an extensive transparency that allows for the internal as well as the external to be perceived simultaneously. *En face* and *en profile* like in Picasso's *L'Arlésienne* (Bek, et al., 1997: 269).

Transparency however, did not only apply to the painting. The idea of cubism is followed definitively in the voluminous works of Gertrude Stein, which includes novels, short stories, prose poems, plays, operas and lectures. In these works, Stein developed a literary modernism, which differed in all respects from other contemporary authors. Stein had a desire to operate beyond object-based poetry, which derives from a dismissal of femininity and an urge to create a form in its place. This should reveal continuity between the ego and the environment (Nicholls, 1995: 202).

A study of Gertrude Stein's works confirm that even in the early works, Stein's focus is constantly on a retreat from structure and the conventional composition of writing. Language, thus, started to assume a new opacity (Nicholls, 1995: 202). It can be said that Stein invents another version of modernism, by bypassing the image and studying the concise self-sufficiency of language, which some people find decadent. Stein used past times' modern painting, especially Picasso, as the model. The connection between writing and painting is clearly expressed in the following remarks about Cézanne: 'Up to that time composition had consisted of a central idea, to which everything else was an accompaniment and separate but not an end in itself, and Cezanne conceived the idea that in composition one thing was as important as another thing. Each part is as important as the whole' (Nicholls, 1995: 203).

The incentive to the artist's work is mainly the sight and what is seen. What the artist tries to maintain in his work is, therefore, not reality as such. It is rather the visual structure, by virtue of which the environment appears to be ordered visually by the artist and his contemporaries, in order to be grasped within the given frame of understanding (Bek, et al., 1997: 29).

Allow me to exemplify this. While Picasso studied light and time – he tried to integrate the two – Stein also works with the eyes. Hence, Picasso's 'Fruit Bowl' from 1908-1909 have opposing flows of light – one flows from above and one from below (Mailer, 1996: 293). An analogue to Stein, who claimed that she sensed language with her eyes. 'It does not make any difference to me what language I hear, I don't hear a language, I hear tones of voice and rhythms, but with my eyes I see words and sentences' (Stendhal, 1995: 73).

Apparently, none of the cubistic thoughts and experimental currents were connected to gastronomy. In fact, it seemed as if the chefs and gastronomes of the past preferred to avoid contact with these activities, and concentrated their energy on the classical meal.

Curnonsky set the fashion during these years. Perhaps the only indication of something new. But not a new dimension, and certainly not something pointing in the direction of possibilities in terms of moving towards the position of avant-garde and creating a connection to cubism.

What did the cubists eat? What about Matisse and Picasso, these two great characters of twentieth century art, two characters that were perceived as opposites and rivals. In Gertrude Stein's book 'Picasso', the following dispute can be found regarding the matter of eating a tomato. Matisse is asked: '...if, when he ate a tomato, he saw it as he painted it'. No, Matisse said, 'When I eat it I see it as everybody sees it'. And, says Stein, this is because painters like Matisse perceive nature in the same way as all other people perceive it. And they express it more or less emotionally, clearly or intensely in order to depict the tomato exactly how the whole world sees it.

But Picasso is not like that. When he eats a tomato, the tomato is, according to Stein: 'not everybody's tomato, not at all', and she continues 'his effort was not to express in his way the things seen as every one sees them, but to express the thing as he was seeing it' (Stein, 1984: 17).

Gastronomy on the other hand broke with the traditional outer boundaries of the meal. The established foundation was used as a basis on which people worked, and it soon came to liberate the artistic culture from the visual rules of the past.

The focal point in this story is Pablo Picasso, for whom the meal was of great importance. Food affected his life and art deeply. He often drew with wine on the paper table-cloths of the cafés, and caught himself and people around him in lifelike portraits.

As an example of the gastronomical limitation of the time, I will refer to a farewell dinner, which preceded Picasso's trip to Spain in the spring of 1905. Picasso had sold several works of art to art dealer Ambroise Vollard and wanted to travel for the money.

Subsequently, Apollinaire wrote to him about their heroic expedition to the train and the farewell dinner: 'Oh Vatel, Oh Carême, Oh Brillat-Savarin, the dinner we have had and the wines, pouring down the guests starched waistcoats' (Herscher, 1996: 75).

It is definitely a dinner that refers to the classical principles and ideals, where neither of the currents that are underway seem to be indicated nor represented. Apollinaire conclusively refers to the most important culinary front figures of the past. To the famous chief caterer Vatel, to Carême, and last but not least, the father of gastronomy, Brillat-Savarin.

The deeper meaning of the cultural process in cubism was not a modification of

the content of artistic representation, but a modification of the traditional concept of art as a representative activity.

In 1908, Picasso was in the middle of cubism's locks when he arranged the famous hommage for le Douanier Rousseau in his studio in Bateau Lavoir, where Fernandes' 'ris à la Valencienne', not a newly composed dish, was served (Mailer, 1996: 278).

There are many descriptions of this grand party, which the cubists held. Not everybody agrees on the course of events, except that the gastronomical highlight of the party was the serving of 'ris à la Valencienne'. This dish could very well have been based on the painter Heni de Toulouse-Lautrec's traditional recipe, the same Toulouse-Lautrec, who had a large influence on Picasso's first late impressionistic works (Rodrigues-Hunter, 1994: 29).

The same traditional level existed when Alice B. Toklas prepared a perch for Picasso one of the times he had lunch at Gertude Stein's. She garnished a finely striped perch in a way she thought would amuse Picasso.

The cold steamed perch was covered with a pattern of different garnishes, and Alice B. Toklas proudly served her masterpiece for Picasso. He praised it enthusiastically for its beauty. But, he said, it should probably have been prepared in honour of Matisse rather than me (Toklas, 1981: 32).

Does a parallel exist in another dish, which Toklas created for Picasso? For many years, Picasso was on a strict diet; red meat was forbidden. But a spinach-soufflé, since spinach was recommended strongly by Picasso's doctor? Perhaps it could become a bit more interesting if a sauce was added (Toklas, 1981: 32).

But which sauce would Picasso's diet allow him to eat? Like in the film *Babette's Feast*, Toklas decided to give him a whole selection – the B in Alice B. Toklas is for Babette. In equal areas around the soufflé; hollandaise sauce, a cream sauce and a tomato sauce were arranged. 'Scary puzzle', said Picasso, when he was served the soufflé (Toklas, 1981: 33).

The traditional understanding of gastronomy is not sufficient here. As it has been emphasised, gastronomy has to be seen as a much more complete art form, where not only sight and the olfactory sense but all of the senses are represented.

One of the things that separated purism from cubism was the maintenance of the motif's recognisability. Therefore, as mentioned, articles for everyday use were often represented. Simple standardised objects like glasses, plates and bottles are included because they qualify as simple foundations of meditations over the original meaning of the painting – form and space in infinite interaction – of great poetic power (Statens Museum for Kunst, the Danish National Gallery, Catalogue, 1987: 15).

To let them all meet at the transparent meal at the same time in Villa Stein; Picasso, Braque, Le Corbusier, Gertrude Stein and Matisse, confirms the reciprocal penetration of time and space. As a statement that cubism is fascinating because it is uncanny, resonant and full of disturbing awareness that time itself is being budged. Because while we stare at the objects in cubist paintings, call them depths or phe-

nomena or visions of each of the canvas' parts, we step directly out of our sense of the present and into another mysterious time dimension, which is best described as non-present (Mailer, 1996: 310).

New forms of perception and new feelings are thus indicated as formulations of a meal. A meal that has a plurality of reference levels or reference points and at the same time, in short, includes the idea of space-time.

But who prepares the *Merluccius merluccius*? The hake. As has been pointed out, Apollinaire's epoch-making *Les Peintres cubistes* was the first presentation of cubism. An astounding amount of what separates 20th-century poetry from 19th-century poetry is caused by Apollinaire. Not least that nature and technology are placed on an equal footing as artistic objects.

One of the chefs that separate the 21st century from the 20th century in Scandinavia is the very young and competent Nikolai Kirk. There is no doubt that Nikolai Kirk seeks stagnation and movement, growth and dissolution, the sense perceptions of childhood and subversion at the same time. To do everything at the same time in one single dish. I believe that he is as set on capturing the whole as Einstein was in his search of a general theory that would include movement, space, gravity and energy in one single formula. In the preface to his book, *Kirks Fisk*, Nikolai Kirk says that he was born for water, that Aquarius is his sign. That he grew up with water over his head, namely a small fish-tank. He slept side by side with his fish, and they shared his nightmares. He is extremely fascinated by water. Water plays an important role in his life. In almost mythological phrases, he describes the taste of the fish, its smooth surface, its agility and how it almost flies, but without noise and without a tail of smoke. 'It is close to perfection' (Kirk, 2000: 12).

The cubists broke with naturalistic continuity in painting and introduced superimposed or overlaying points of view that referred to different points of view, none of which were used as an absolute reference point (Benevolo, 1989: 393).

They broke down the totality into its basic components: lines, surfaces, colours. That is exactly Kirk's motif in his composition 'Hake baked with smoked peppers served with warm lamb's lettuce (mâche) and macaroni in lemon oil' (Kirk, 2000: 60).[1]

This dish reveals liberating elements of new qualities and new meaning, which have been hidden behind the hake's conventional skin from the beginning. New elements begin to exist between the elements, which are organised according to new rules. Through the smoked pepper that has an almost fluorescent orange transparency, the hake's white and yet transparent flesh is sensed.

Kirk not only tries to depict the smooth external appearance of the fish; he also tries to get a hold of its fine and delicate internal appearance. We are forced to move around the fish through the layers of the smoked pepper, and we can thus establish that Kirk's fascination with the fish expands the sphere of our feelings. In the preparation it is the interplay between nervousness, seriousness and the ability to keep one's

head that gives the dish its ambiguous meaning. One looks at the fish almost at close range and almost from a distance. Exactly such a transparency of overlapping sheets exists in the composition – like in Picasso's *L'Arlésienne*. Sheets that seemingly are made of celluloid, we get a sense of looking through the layers in the baked fillet; we not only experience material-transparency but an evident phenomenon-bound transparency.

The dish, thus, contains cubism's precepts or some sort of dichotomy, which does not automatically follow the development that was founded by cubism and its repercussions on architecture. The dish also points to the future.

This leads us back to Villa Stein's kitchen. In an entirely practical and inconceivably simple room cleared of all decorations, where the fish's eye, even in death, is the only seeing or living thing.

Raymond Cogniats described how Picasso and Braque reached a total conceptualisation of the painting, which from now on was an object in itself, independent on the realistic representation of an object. An object, which has its own architecture, its own space and perspective, and which is not a series of planes that are procured through the methods of traditional perspective. An object that makes the work form a homogenous whole and which is closed around itself (Mailer, 1996: 308).

I assert that Nikolai Kirk's dish both thematises cubism's formal problem, the many layers on layers, the internal and external appearances that are shown at the same time and, thus, it passes on some of the universal elements from cubism.

By incorporating the fish on the kitchen table in Villa Stein in his dish, the connection between time and space remains intact. And the meal, thus, represents a definite result, which holds past, present and future at the same time.

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Note

1. 'Hake baked with smoked peppers, served with warm lamb's lettuce and macaroni in lemon oil'.
(serves 5)
500 grams of hake fillet without skin and bones
5 peppers without skin and seeds
100 grams of rice
100 grams of clayed [semi-refined, Demerera] sugar
100 grams of jasmine tea
100 grams of pasta dough, thinly rolled out
½ decilitre of lemon oil
½ kilo lamb's lettuce (mâche)
20 grams of finely chopped pine nuts
1 tablespoonful of cherry vinegar
1 decilitre of light junket
4 sprigs of dill
5 grams of granulated sugar
(Kirk, 2000: 60).